

A comparison of the plays macbeth and antigone



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“ Show me a hero and I’ll write you a tragedy.” F. Scott Fitzgerald isn’t the only novelist who uses tragedy, in specific, tragic heroes, in his storylines to promote the disastrous happenings caused by fate. Both Shakespeare and Sophocles incorporate tragic heroes in their plays Macbeth and Antigone. A tragic hero, by definition, is often someone who ends up in the wrong place at the wrong time, but at the same moment, reveals strength, courage, and independence no matter what fate has set out for him. Although Creon and Macbeth both share common aspects in tragedy; ultimately, Macbeth is more of a tragic hero than Creon because Macbeth was portrayed as a more respectable person than Creon was, however, unlike Creon, Macbeth never learned from his mistakes.

Although both Macbeth and Creon start out as good characters, Macbeth is portrayed more heroically because his actions speak louder than Creon’s bleak words, and he is influenced by his wife, Lady Macbeth, while Creon chose his own path. By possessing a supreme pride, having a capacity for suffering, and setting a belief in their own freedom, both Creon and Macbeth are defined as tragic heroes. Although Creon was depicted as a very wealthy and feared king, he is still a flawed human nonetheless. In Greek religion, kings had no power to question the law of the gods, however, that is exactly where Creon was testing the waters. In his monologue, Creon delivers his command in that “ Polynices...is to have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least pray for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied.” (Line 29) However, Antigone still gives a proper burial to her brother, thus deliberately disobeying Creon. Creon states explicitly, “ Oh but I hate it even more when a traitor, caught red-handed tries to glorify his crimes,” (Lines 552-554). By

commanding no burial, Creon defies the “ great unwritten, unshakable traditions” (Lines 502-503), known as the ancient law of the gods, since it is commanded that which in upon death, requires a proper burial. By doing so, he is not only going against both the gods and chorus, but even his own family in that he’s breaking apart his son’s marriage with a “ traitor” just to prove his own supremacy and prideful thinking. In the same sense, Macbeth also refuses to give in to his surroundings. In the very beginning, Macbeth is described as “ brave Macbeth” (Act 1, scene 2, Line 18) and a “ worthy gentleman” (Act 1, Scene 2, Line 26) . When Ross discussed the battle, he says, “ Till that Bellona’s bridegroom, lapped in proof. Confronted him with self-comparisons” (Act 1, Scene 3, Line 61-62) This quote exposes how Macbeth was a loyal and worthy warrior because “ Bellona” alludes to the Roman goddess of war, and the phrase “ Bellona’s bridegroom” implies that the individual is the fiercest warrior, because the goddess of war would only marry the most courageous, powerful warrior. “ Lapped in proof...self-comparisons” indicates to be clothed in worthy armor while matching a foes attacks, which further emphasizes how Macbeth proved his bravery and loyalty to the king during that battle and was one of the best warriors in Norway. Even the king, Duncan, called him worthy as Ross describes him as being brave, pointing out that Macbeth is a war hero in the very beginning. This reinforces how Macbeth was a loyal citizen and was willing to die for his king, even though there was no close relationship between them. Macbeth’s actions confirm that his good character is believable and consistent because in society, people are only willing to die for things they truly believe in. However, Macbeth is manipulated by his wife, which leads to his downfall. When he says that he will not proceed any further in the planned murder of

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Duncan, his wife convinces him to continue, asking if he will just “ live a coward in thine own esteem” (Act 1, Scene 7, Line 47) and urging him to “ screw your courage to the sticking place” because “ we’ll not fail” (Act 1, Scene 7, Lines 70-71). Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to hold onto his courage, which is ironic because it takes a coward to murder a sleeping king, but he will also be a coward if he does not kill the king, because there is no courage when one is betraying someone, yet Macbeth’s wife corrupts him and gives his pride a push, setting his downfall into motion. Creon isn’t as admirable as Macbeth because he was made king by circumstance and did not prove his loyalty to his country through his actions. Also, Creon chose his own actions that lead to his downfall and takes no orders from anybody. He says “ You’ll never bury that body in the grave, Not even if Zeus’s eagles rip the corpse and wing their rotten pickings off to the throne of god!” (1151-1152) and tells Tiresias that he only speaks “ it out for profit” Sophocles (1178). Macbeth was encouraged to betray the king, which led to his downfall, but Creon was discouraged to follow his own ways leading to his downfall when he followed his own path.

Although these two characters are both faced with tragedy, Macbeth is more tragic than Creon because while Creon was able to understand his mistake and correct himself, Macbeth was not given an opportunity to change. Creon also shows realization of all the trouble he has caused as he confesses, “ And the guilt is all mine- can never be fixed on another man, no escape for me. I killed you, I, god help me, I admit it all!” (126) Creon admits his wrongdoings and transforms from a tyrant to a compassionate individual willing to change his ways. The pride that he once showed is now replaced with guilt and

remorse. This shows how Creon is vulnerable to disappointments, griefs, and sorrows. Unlike Macbeth, Creon transitions from a flawed and prideful character to a sympathetic and regretful one and therefore makes Macbeth more tragic of the two. He says "Thou wast born of woman. But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn" (Act 5, Scene 7, Lines 15-17) and "I will not yield to kiss the ground before Malcolm's feet" (Act 5, Scene 8, Lines 32-33). Macbeth now believes that he is invincible since he can only die to someone not born of a woman. "Swords I smile at" is a hyperbole, indicating that Macbeth is not afraid of swords or weapons because the blinding pride he possesses causes him to believe he cannot be killed. However, he is killed by Macduff before he can realize how his own ambition and pride changed him. Even to his dying breath, he did not "kiss the ground", emphasizing how stubborn he was and emphasizes Macbeth's strong will to do as he pleases and not surrender to anyone who stands in his way. This proves that Macbeth's pride, pushed by his wife, led to his downfall because he believed no one could kill him, and even when nearing death, he refused to give up his pride. This is tragic because Macbeth is never given the chance to repent or realize the extent of the atrocities he committed. When pride is never acknowledged and never given up, fate takes over and leads to death.

Ultimately, Macbeth is more of a tragic hero compared to Creon despite their shared tragedies because Macbeth's character was more believable and constant, as he never had the opportunity to comprehend his mindless acts or correct them. Creon went against everyone's reason, yet had the chance to move on and improve his character. They both had a taste of fault but unlike Creon who learned to change himself for the better, Macbeth remains

stubborn to his death. Both characters experienced a tragic downfall due to their pride, but Macbeth fell harder and farther.